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Contributions of Sense of Place to Sustainability in Agricultural Landscapes

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Introduction

Place

Place became a focus in natural resource management in the 1990s, with the concept used to improve our understanding of forest, national park and farm management and in managing resource uses such as recreation and tourism (Moore 1997). But what is 'place'? There is a substantial literature on place in environmental psychology, human geography, anthropology and landscape architecture. Place has also been widely considered in the literary world. Current researchers talk of place creation, place attachment, sense of place and place identity. The most commonly used term is sense of place, one increasingly used to cover two or more components, such as place attachment and place familiarity. My preference and following on from Relph's (1976) work, is to define and address place as an integrated phenomenon:

> Places are fusions of human and natural order and are the significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world…[they] are directly experienced phenomena of the lived-world and hence are full with meanings, with real objects, and with ongoing activities. They are important sources of individual and communal identity, and are often profound centres of human existence to which people have deep emotional and psychological ties. (Relph 1976, 141)

Place is thus a coming together of the physical and social worlds. It is defined through people interacting with the place and with each other. Place has also been described as the way in which people attach meaning and importance to space (Stankey 1995, in Kruger 1996). Individuals' identities are constructed and re-constructed through interacting with place and each other.

The dimensions of place apparent from Relph's work and also in much of the natural resource management research include the physical setting, activities, experiences and identity. All four dimensions were evident in the study on which this paper is based. The physical setting was the farm. The activities centered on livestock and cropping, plus conservation works and leisure activities, such as picnicking. Many of the experiences were constructed through interactions with others, predominantly other family members. For example, parents reminisced about their children enjoying rock piles, dams and the Avon River. The identities of farmers and their wives were constructed and negotiated through interacting with the land and others. This was the most complex dimension and is the focus of this paper.

Sustainability

Sustainability is now part of everyday language and the triple bottom line (Elkington 1997) incorporating economic, ecological and social sustainability is becoming so. Agricultural sustainability is a central concern in Australia as in a number of other countries. In this country, 5.7 m ha of agricultural and pastoral lands have a high potential to develop salinity. Deteriorating regional social infrastrucure such as access to banking, schools and medical facilities is of growing concern. Additionally, the economic viability of many farms is questionable. To move towards sustainability, significant changes in farming practices are likely to be required. If changes are to be successful, we must have a better understanding of the social influences on and aspects of farming (Moore 2001). How farmers and their families construct and negotiate their identities in relation to place can help improve our understanding this important element of sustainability.

The Study

This paper reports on research conducted in the western part of the WA wheatbelt with landholders and their families, exploring their sense of place in relation to their farmlands. A total of 27 families were part of the study, with family members taking photos of places special to them, with a disposable camera provided for them, and subsequent interviews centring on their photos. This technique has been widely used in visual anthropology (e.g. Harper 1982) but is only now making its way into place research. Farmers were selected

who derived a living from their land, rather than hobby farmers, given my interest in understanding the relationships between sense of place and agricultural sustainability.

In several families three generations were interviewed. The oldest person interviewed was around 80 while the youngest was three. Many of those interviewed were in their 50s and were the second generation or more to own and work on the farm. In most cases, both the farmer and wife were interviewed and often both had taken the photos.

Theoretical Perspectives – Symbolic Interactionism & the Presentation of Self

Symbolic interactionism, a sociological perspective, lends itself to investigating place. This perspective focuses on the nature of social interaction and how meanings are derived and modified through interaction: with oneself, with others and with the surrounding environment and its objects (Blumer 1969). Place is similarly constructed by people through such interactive processes. Symbolic interactionism enables us to consider humans as active, constructing and adjusting to place rather than merely responding to their environment.

Self, of which identity is a key part, is of central interest in symbolic interactionism. Identities are recognised as socially constructed, negotiated and transformed (Berger 1963, in Charon 1992). Identity is how an individual labels themselves, who they identity with (e.g. farmer, farmer's wife) and what motivates them. Identities are constructed through interacting with and constructing place, both alone and with significant others.

Goffman's work on the presentation of self (Goffman 1959) also helps inform our understanding of identity and place. He was centrally interested in the structure, processes and products of social interaction. His dramaturgical approach was based on viewing social life and its interactions as a "staged drama". (Charon 1992). The following quote is illustrative:

> …the object of the performer is to sustain a particular definition of the situation [e.g. "farming"], this representing…his claim as to what reality is. (Goffman 1959, 85)

He develops the idea of staged performance to describe how individuals "perform" to manage others' impressions. Goffman's work is useful to place research because it helps describe how farmers' identities are constructed by managing others' impressions about their worth, not only as farmers but also in a number of other identities.

Farming, Place and Identity

Given our interest in the construction and negotiation of identities in relation to place, what are the elements of identity that became evident from this study? Before descibing these elements, a brief mention of the method of analysis is warranted. Analysis was based on grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990) with themes emerging and being fully described through coding and re-coding the interview transcripts and associated photos. Each theme coalesced around an aspect or feature of identity. For example, one of the themes was "having productive land", so analysis sought to fully describe this theme.

Six broad elements were the outcome of this analysis. These were knowing the land, having productive land, hard work and achievement, the home and garden, owning special features, and constructing rurality. Not all elements were expressed by all of those interviewed. Some people emphasised several with no mention made of others. For all interviewed, however, identity had multiple dimensions. Descriptions of these six elements follow, using quotes from the interviews and photos taken by the respondents. Each description concludes with comments on the implications of these findings for agricultural sustainability.

1. Knowing the Land

Knowing the land was expressed by a number of people as intimately knowing the features of their land: "Cos I know every square inch of the place. I know exactly what will happen everywhere." [male, 50s] and "Driving around spraying (knowing all the rock heaps, where you get bogged)." [male, 50s]. It was also expressed as recognising the different productive functions of their land: "Researcher: When you look at the hills what do you see? Respondent: Good grazing country" [male, 50s] and "You need some rough ground for your stock and you can crop some of the land that's arable." [male, 60s]

Knowing the land was also connected to wanting to look after it:

> We're very keen on sustainable farming…Most farmers who have lived on their country all their lives will say that- they like the land to look good. No genuine farmer that loves his country likes to see it worn out. [male, 60s]

Part of individuals' identities in relation to their land was built through telling narratives/stories about why things are the way they are or how they have changed. Land degradation issues such as salinity and erosion we often mentioned as the landholder identifying the problem (often before others) and then taking action. They then reflected on the outcome that was often successful but not always. One landholder described how they had planted trees and grass to successfully manage a salinity and erosion problem:

> Years ago we had salt country - bit of salt creek country - the head of the creek was in the back country and then flowed back through the neighbours and then came back through here. And when we cleared the country we could see that this creek was going salt back there so we planted a lot of *Paspalum veginatum* [grass] and fenced off areas and grew trees… [male, 60s].

Knowledge about the land was built through interactions both with the land and with significant others – where you get bogged, crop failure, learning from your father. Several landholders talked of unexpected, heavy rains making it impossible to seed or spray emerging crops for weeds without getting bogged and how they had subsequently changed their practices to avoid similar problems in the future. This was knowledge built through interacting with the land.

Knowledge was passed on by parents to children:

> You hope for the kids, you bring them up on the land and they're learning…while…you were young…there were things you picked up. It might be mustering sheep out of…those hills. There are some days that you just can't muster if the wind's not going in the right direction and our kids know that. They know that the sheep will move better into the wind than with a tail wind. There's little things like that. [male, 30/40s]

Knowing the land in relation to farming practices was mentioned predominantly by the males interviewed. Knowing the land for females was most apparent in their comments about enjoying the Avon River and wildflowers in different seasons.

Implications for Identity and Sustainability

Knowing the land in relation to farming practices was predominantly part of the male identity. Thus, sustainability where knowing the land is linked to identity is male-oriented and derived. Part of this identity was looking after the land – most farmers like their land to "look good". Sustainability discourse couched in terms of knowing the land and using this knowledge to make sure the land looks good is likely to be effective.

The downside of this is looking good in this study was equated with having expansive areas of crops and/or tidy farms. Very often, remnant vegetation and tree planting mimicking natural growing patterns do not look tidy. Knowledge is built through interactions, hence interactions with the environment and significant others could be used to change perceptions regarding "looking good" so that trees and bush on farms are part of this.

2. Having "Productive" Land

The notion of having productive land underpinned many of the comments made by landholders (both males and females interviewed). Some examples follow, predominantly in relation to cropping lands (at the time of the interviews crops were bringing greater returns than wool):

> …that's what one intends, or one sets out to grow each year. A very heavy crop, you know, and that's the crop of the year. It was a good crop. [male, 40/50s]

> I suppose, of just the pure economics of farming, there are certain areas, certain paddocks and things on the farm that always produce bigger crops and things so…they are of more significance. [male, 40/50s]

Productivity for stock and grazing was also mentioned: "…this is the best country. It grows all sorts of grasses." [male, 60s]. There was pride in having good sheep: "Sheep – we reckon we have got perhaps the best sheep in the district" [male, 40/50s] and "We grew them from lambs right through and that's the fruit of

our labour I…suppose. They all went out in…semis…with four or five hundred sheep on board…sort of gives you a good feeling." [male, 40s] And also in cattle: "…the cattle were my pride and joy in those days. When these pictures were taken [looking in an album] we had 250 breeding cows then." [male, 60s]

Management of the farm is focused on getting production. The following quote illustrates how deep drainage (a controversial management measure because of possible downstream effects on other landholders and values) is justified as necessary to maintain crop production:

> So we need to be allowed, in bureaucratic terms they're trying to say we're not allowed to drain our excess water, our deeper water into water courses. But we have to, otherwise we lose production off this country. [male, 50s]

Obviously this production is driven by economic imperatives as well as a sense of what farmers "do".

> It would be a waste to do any more [tree planting]…because you would be taking away productive land and lets face it, this cosmetic thing is OK but it doesn't put anything in your pocket and everything has to be viable it doesn't matter what you're doing, surely. [male, 60s]

Another part of having productive land was leaving the farm in "better" condition:

> But generally, if you feel at the end of your day that you have been through the soil fertility and you have done all you can as far as minimising any salt land, and that sort of thing, you know, just leaving it more productive, I guess, than it was. [male, 40/50s]

What was regarded as productive was constructed through interacting with the market, other farmers and the land. At the time of this research (late 1990s) the market was dictating that crops were "more productive" than wool. Thus, many of the photos and discussion centred on crops and cropping lands. Productive was also defined through interactions with others, especially other farmers: "I guess rural people, especially if they're farming people,…they're really looking at what you're producing…" [female, 50s]. When rural people visit each other they are interested in and recognise others for the productive uses of their land. Identity is also expressed by what others can see from the road. One respondent commented that they were doing conservation works (e.g. contour banks, drains, dams, more trees) in places other than those visible from the road [female, 50s].

Identity was also constructed through interacting with the land:

There's nothing worse…than harvesting a poor crop or a weedy patch, or like last year we had a lot of wet spots with nothing on them. But then you get into a good patch like that and you really feel you've accomplished something.

Oppositional to the concept of productive lands was parts of a number of farms described as "out the back", "out the river" or "over the river". Both males and females referred to out the back, with both mentioning nature, and females predominantly mentioning picnics. Nature values were expressed as: "The wildflowers are beautiful out the back…There's 400 acre of bush on the back of our place." [female, late 40s] and "…when I was a kid over the back…not only was there all the wildflowers…there was five Curlews lived over there and as a kid I walked there and they'd run in front of me" [male, 50/60s]

Out the back was also the place where families and visitors went for picnics: "It's no benefit to us really, it's just the creeks out the back that create picnic spots…Anybody that comes up we usually take them out…" [female, 40s]. And, "…there's the waterfall in full swing [flicking through an old album]. That's up the back. That's one of our favourite spots, the waterfall." [female, 50ish]. Out the back was not generally mentioned for its productive uses but was valued for its leisure features and nature. It seemed to be a more private part of farms.

Lastly, out the back was a place where bush could be retained or trees planted because it was unlikely to detract from the productivity of cropping land. "…we've planted a lot of trees out the back…so it would blend in rather than using up…we do crop as well…so that it…didn't use up the cropping land." [female 40s]

Implications for Identity and Sustainability

Having productive land (land that appeared productive to the respondents and other members of their rural community) was an important element of many men and womens' identities. Good farmers have productive

land, with productivity defined by markets, other farmers and the land itself. In terms of sustainability (and if sustainability requires changes in land management practices), then those intervening to improve sustainability need to consider influencing market signals, other farmers and the land itself. Farmers and their wives construct their identity in relation to productive lands through interactions with all three.

As with the first element, knowing the land, there was also interest expressed here in leaving the farm more productive than it was. Such a concern for the future, often expressed as intergenerational equity is a core consideration in the rhetoric of sutainability. Expression of this interest as part of farming identity bodes well for moving towards sustainability.

Part of respondents' identities was also derived from having non-productive land "out the back". Sustainability interventions must recognise the "value" of such non-productive areas to landholders. They are the back stage of the farm (Goffman 1959) where non-productive activities can be engaged in with family and friends. Such activities include picnics, relaxing (escaping from the work of the farm) and enjoying nature. They are also where tree planting can be carried out away from the scrutiny of neighbours. Moves to sustainability could include tree planting out the back as well as clear acknowledgment that these places are equally as important for rural identities as the productive lands.

3. Hard Work and Achievement

Hard work was identified as integral to farming:

> Talking about what we see [across our farm], we see work. I see hardship about working the land, whereas when you bring other people here all they see is the beauty of the country. [male, 50s]

Planting trees is now regarded as an integral part of farm work:

> We plant 700 trees a year and everyone is into that. I don't know if it will do any good but it makes us feel better about it and we know it may do. [male, 60s]

Its recognition as hard work (and part of the accepted hard work of farming) is also indicative of its acceptance as part of farming practice:

> It's just really hard…planting trees, you don't realise…You've got to fence them all so the sheep don't get them, you've got to rip the ground and plant them by hand, that's what we do anyway…we planted 3,000 trees and ended up with about 300 and they cost a dollar each. They were all growing beautifully and come this time of year when all the water dried up the rabbits came out and ringbarked them. [male, 50s]

Although tree planting was considered as part of farming, Landcare did not seem to be defined as a central part of farming work. Landcare is an Australian phenomenon whereby groups of farmers work together to improve their lands. Tree planting has been one of the most widely publicised activities undertaken by Landcare groups. In interviews, very few respondents mentioned their involvement in Landcare without being prompted. When prompted the following were common responses although several respondents spoke very positively about Landcare:

> Interviewer: So what's your involvement with the Landcare group? Respondent: Planting the trees and taking the money. I wouldn't be taking it if they weren't giving it away. [male, 40s]
>
> I've been doing all what they're yabbing about, I've been doing it [Landcare] all my life. I don't know what they're trying to go on about it. [male, 50s]
>
> …we belong to a Landcare group but we are sort of one of those luke warm type members. We...because we are so busy we don't sort of get involved in it as much as possible… [male, 40/50s]

This view regarding Landcare can be attributed in this study in large part to the reasonable quality of most of these farming properties with most unaffected by salinity or soil erosion, both of which are regarded as the focus of Landcare. Also, the highly individualistic nature of farmers mean that many are reticent rather than enthusiastic about collective activities such as Landcare.

Working with stock was also identified as hard work:

> … we've been chasing sheep across [the Avon River] and they've been dying, children holding heads up in the water until I got them out…We must get the sheep across because it's going to rain,

> otherwise we have to walk them 6 or 7 miles around the road which is a nuisance and you try to avoid that. [male, 60s]

Interestingly, only one person explicitly commented that cropping was hard work:

> It's hardship comparing it with eastern districts agriculture - the ease of the machinery working in the paddocks and all that whereas here it's a lot difficulter because of the terrain and the rocks. And that's what you see. You can't get it out of your mind. The country's beautiful - we all appreciate that but if you go up there you see - "Oh gee, that paddock's hard to work and all those sorts of things". Different perspective all together. [male, 50s]

Others mentioned problems associated with cropping but not that it was hard work. Perhaps the novelty of new machinery and the highly mechanised nature of cropping make the work easier. Or perhaps the income returned offsets notions of hard work.

Males and females liked views across their farms in part because they could see what they've achieved: "You can see all that you've done. You plant trees down the creek, you can see them all going off in a line…" [male, 50s] and "All these paddocks down there. Really great…They used to cut something like 500 tons of chaff a year so they were really productive paddocks." [male, 60] and "This, from the top of the hill when you look down you can see all these trees we've planted. They haven't come out all that well on the photo but when you look down it's really lovely. There's thousands upon thousands there." [female, 50s]

There seemed to a focus on visible outcomes. "See that's, whether you've got a dirty job on like that, digging a tractor out of a bog. You can't get much dirtier in some cases and trying to work out how to do it and all the rest of it or you're in the hot dust in the sheep yards, all the worst jobs on the farm still give you a sense of achievement. One of the worst job I always thought was carting small bales of hay and making you know, but when you've finished carting and made a big stack at least you can look back at that stack and think 'gee, that was quite a thing to build'." [male, 30/40s]

Contributing to the local community was noted by a number of landholders as being part of farm work. This element of "farm" work was identified when landholders talked critically about hobby farmers, saying they were unlikely to do the hard work of contributing to running of local clubs. "I don't think they [hobby farmers]] are really very much value to the district...they don't…join the clubs and take on the presidency or anything like that. They might use the clubs but they don't…do any of the hard work." [male, 50s]

Women made a multi-faceted contribution to farm work, especially tree planting, and as such probably derived multiple aspects of their identity from such activities. Work for a number was both on and off farm, with on-farm work also including looking after children and the home, providing meals, and for a number but not all, establishing and maintaining a house and garden. Some illustrative quotes follow:

> We [husband and wife] used to work together and when the children were at school and she was bored in the house, she did sew a lot but after that she loved coming out and helping me. She could do anything, she could drive a tractor, we would run fencing, it's good it was. [male, 60s]

Providing meals was not only a home-based activity: "I've got a plough disc just about in every paddock by a rock heap and while he is going round and round and seeding I'll cook the lunch on the plough disc. You can still go up there…and find all my little plough discs…I just leave them there and build a fire and I've got the kettle boiling and cook his lunch if it's a nice day. One day I got caught in a shower of rain." [female, 40s]. This example also illustrates the blurring of work and leisure boundaries which seems to typify farming life. The incident involves the work of preparing the lunch but also the leisure and enjoyment of being out on the farm with her husband.

Working off the farm was an economic necessity for many as well as a choice regarding retaining a rural lifestyle: "So it's [farming] changed, it's…very hard to make a living. That's why most, you'll find most wives are out working…The farm's not making [money]…it's a way of life." [female, 40s]

Farm work is clearly more encompassing of peoples' lives given they live within their place of work. The following quote is illustrative: "Farming becomes much more than a commercial venture. Other people leave work and switch off. A lot of our work takes place at night and lunchtime, e.g., talking to stock firms." [male, 60s]

Breaks from work were provided by lunches with family (see above), bush and the hills. The Avon River and associated bush provided respite for some: "You could go down there and it was like being in another world

with the big pools and all the paperbark and so forth." [male, 60s]. The hills were used by others: "You know if you have a hard day here you can always get on your motor bike or go for a walk through those hills and that's a fun way of getting rid of your stress. There's no-one there. There's just birds and kangaroos or sheep and animals or whatever and it's a way of...." [male, 30/40s]

Notions of work were constructed for many during their childhoods: "Feeding sheep and stuff like that…when we were younger. All over the farm basically. Not just in one area…if Dad went…we went with him." [male, 50s]

> If you're not brought up getting up early and, this might sound old-fashioned and that but it's so true, you try to bring someone out of the city whose worked in an office job and get them out there early every morning and work till dark every night digging rocks and things and if you're not brought doing that you can't suddenly adjust to doing it. [male, 40s]

Implications for Identity and Sustainability

Goffman's views regarding performance are particularly informative here. As a drama, farming centres on hard work, so any changes in farming practices will need to recognise the importance of hard work to farmers' identities. Moving people out of farming, for example, to achieve sustainability goals, must recognise this large portion of identity linked to hard work in a farm setting. For males, hard work centres on physical activities associated with producing an income although interestingly tree planting and fencing remnants now appear as acceptable performances in the farming enterprise.

Hard work was acknowledged through being able to view and share achievements such as rows of planted trees or baled hay. Therefore if sustainability outcomes can be viewed and the achievement shared with and admired by significant others then it is likely to be done. Subtle, less visible actions such as planning may be more difficult to get adopted.

Womens' identities derived through work are much more multi-faceted. As such, they may be more robust in terms of changing direction, than their male counterparts. Such robustness depends on them being able to drop or minimise one or more identities, for example forgoing their farming involvement if re-structuring for sustainability moves them off the land.

Breaks from hard work were also part of respondents' identities. This means that to sustain hard work some back stage areas are needed on farms, such as areas of bush, "hills" or "out the back".

Including community activities in the performance of hard work signals the importance of these activities to farmers' identities. Community contributions were only mentioned by the men interviewed, not the women. Such contributions seem important both for individuals in regard to their identities as well as for the broader concern of community sustainability. The two concepts seem mutually supportive.

4. Home and Garden

Photos of both the family home and the garden were taken by males and females. Respondents generally had trouble articulating why they had taken these photos. A number took photos of their houses from above, as part of a broader landscape photo of their farm: "I took that one [photo] because it's got the house there and I dunno, it's just a good pretty part of the farm that there." [male, 60s] and "I like it - while - it's a nice view because there's the river just there and we're looking down on our own house anyway which is sort of attractive…[male, 40s]

One landholder commented that the photo of their house and garden was the select one photo of the ones taken for this project that they would take with them if they had to leave the farm: "Oh, I just think it's where we live. We often sit out at night, have a drink and sit out the front and we look out…" [male, 50s]. The following quote more fully describes these sentiments:

> Well, it is where we live and where we will probably go on living for a long time, and also it has been in my family since, well, I'd be the third generation living in it. So the property has been in our family for, I think, just over 100 years and that house was probably built in the late 1890's, so that is significant, yeah. My wife would say it was extremely significant but just since we've moved here she's put a lot of time into the garden and that sort of thing. [male, 40/50s]

The following quote makes explicit the relationships and interactions built around the home that make it a special place and a source of identity: "My wife made it homely [the house] and got things to go around.

Well there's not much good trying to now, I just keep it tidy. It was a homely place…when the kids were around and so on." [male, 60s]

Having and providing a comfortable home for the family and raising children was important for a number of the those (men and women) interviewed.

> I think that it is important for a woman to be happy on a farm, living a farming life...we would never be able to build a house like that but it just happened to be here when we bought it 24 years ago and I don't think then any importance was attached to these old federation style houses as is now. They are very much sought after by people retiring…the house is a very nice old comfortable family home and has been for us and our children growing up…the house is important to make a woman happy. I think most women would agree with me. [female, 50s]

For some, the state of the home was not important: "Interviewer. When visitors come here what do you show them? Respondent. They never come now. We've let that house fall down and no one ever comes." [male, 60s] and "…the house doesn't earn money so it doesn't get money spent on it at this stage." [male, 30/40s]

A few people took photos of their gardens. Attention to gardens seemed to be an all or nothing venture. Respondents either enthusiastically photographed their garden or didn't mention it at all: "I probably went a bit mad around the house and garden with those photos." [female, 50s] Often, with gardens held in high regard the husband had contributed through providing water or earthworks. In the following quote the farmer built a rockery I an new garden:

> Female: This is the garden which Trevor here sort of did all that. Built all the rockery. Male: …we like to look down on what we've done ourselves and I still get pleasure and sometimes I come across some other ridge just while I'm working, I might come over on the motor bike and it almost catches you by surprise as you come over the hill and all the trees have grown.... [male and female, 40s]

Implications for Identity and Sustainability

The main implication here is that the home is an important centre for farming families and family activities. Those elements of identity derived from family interactions and responsibilities centred on the home. The home may be the best place to discuss sustainability directions and activities with farming families.

5. Owning Special Features

A number of landholders had photos of and were proud of historical features. Often, the value of these features had been conferred through recognition by others. Features of pride included an old shearing shed built of jarrah, barns and silos. The following quote about silos illustrates how importance was conferred, at least in part, through recognition by others:

> It's [the silo] a bit of a monument. Well there's only 3 in Beverley, there's a few in Meckering. We'll try and keep it as long as possible, a lot of people, well I've had two people that have called in to find out about it because its so close to the road. [male, 43]

Many mentions were made of "unique"/special landscapes. Views were highly regarded.

> The other one [photo] you get a view of the two rivers joining and you get a good view. If you look out all around that way you can see for miles…I take people up there and show them and they can see York and all around. And you don't get to see the two rivers meet very much. [male, 27]

Specific features such as pools in the Avon River and special rock formations were also mentioned: "Oh we've got one of the best pools left on the river…I mean a lot of people that come they say 'How lucky you've got that pool in the river'." [male, 60]. One on farm both the husband and wife took photos of the same rock formation, providing slightly different reasons for doing so.

> Female: To me, I think because we call it [a rock formation] the Four Brothers and because it is so different, like there's not rocks that size anywhere around is there? Not that size; they're enormous. And if you look at them you can see things in them too.
>
> Male: As a kid, my Dad said "Well, there are the Four Brothers" and I remember as a kid, sort of going up there and sitting on top of them. And my son and my daughter's done the same, or our son and daughter. And while they're up there they sit on top of the four rocks, the Four Brothers.

Implications for Identity and Sustainability

If sustainability is couched in terms of, or includes a central focus on, historic and landscape features valued by landholders then it will has a greater likelihood of being embraced. Landholders held historic features such as silos in high regard. Also important were features unique to individual properties, such as views of the Avon River and distant towns, River pools and unusual rock formations (e.g. the Four Brothers).

6. Constructing Rurality

Numerous comments made it apparent that a significant part of respondents' identities was derived from being "rural". This rurality was defined through criticism of and differentiation from urban people (Gray and Lawrence 2001):

"There is no way we will be able to be close to people in the city. The differences are colossal. They voice outrageous opinions and are quite ignorant about things that farmers take as common place." [male, 60s]

Urban people were characterised as not understanding rural life with numerous critical comments about hobby farmers based on the perception that they were "urban" people: "People from Perth get blocks, they come up on the weekend and get out with a mower or something and light a fire, you know; the fire ban's on, they've got no idea what's going on!" [male, 60s] Hobby farmers were also criticised because they let weeds grow and the weeds then either spread to other farms or carry a fire. Another criticism was bringing dogs into the area that then maul stock.

Part of this constructed rural-urban divide was identifying farming as hard work:

> So it is something that people should bear in mind that farmers put all their money up front and risk the lot because of the uncertain nature of the climate. They have to have a bit of encouragement from Government and tax payer money from time to time otherwise it becomes too hard and then you get situations where their farming techniques can perhaps [place] too much strain on the soil and that sort of thing. [male, 40/50s]

Farms were identified as providing opportunities not available in urban areas:

> Female: It's the river they go, and they come back black with mud, from head to foot. And they've had mud fights. So it's the river that's the attraction...Male: But that's it, see, there's no - you can't do it in Perth can you? [male and female, 40s]

> …there's just a little waterfall, it's only this high but it's a beautiful little sight and we reckon of course a spot like that anywhere near Perth and you went for a picnic you'd be sharing that with fifty other people and you'd have to line up to use a gas barbecue. We just go out there and there's no one. [male, 40s]

Two other groups were mentioned critically as part of the construction of a rural identity. The first of these was government and bureaucrats:

> …it's ok for them [government and bureaucrats] to say - "your land's going salty, your land's doing this". But in financial terms we can't afford to do it ourselves. So we need some sort of incentive, I would suggest perhaps rebates, tax rebates…But times economically are really tough in recent times. And then if the rest of the community are saying "there's a salinity problem out there to be considered; farmers have got to something about it". It's all very well for them to say that but they need to put their money where their mouth is to the extent that they need to support our existence. [male, 50s]

> So the government…there's a lot of idealists and bureaucrats in government departments might think that planting trees in recharge areas...That crop there, those crops are doing exactly what trees will do. They're pulling water out of the soil and using it. The better crop we can grow the more moisture you pull out…there's a big gap between land managers, farmers and so on and land owners and people who live in glass houses saying what you can do and what you can't do. [male, 30/40s]

The second group was conservationists, mentioned only by a few respondents: "I think it is a nicely looked after area [their stretch of the Avon River] even though a lot of conservationists don't think that it is." [male, 20s]

A final comment re rurality, the landholders although strongly identifying themselves as rural did not regard themselves as a homogenous group. In terms of productive land uses, one landholder differentiated himself from “the big blokes with the 6 or 7,000 acres that are cropping” [male, 60s]. Others explained how their no till, organic or seed cleaning practices set them apart from others. For example, in relation to no till:

> I was the first one in Beverley to do it [no till], now there's a lot of them doing it. Its such a radical move to do, there's been other people do it elsewhere, but I saw it and thought that is the way to do it if you can do it right…Now every man and his dog's doing it all over the state, its really taken off now, incredible. [male, 50s]

The women differentiated themselves in other ways, for example one women grew her own trees for their tree planting work (saving the farm money) while another spent her energies making their home attractive and made the associated comment: “You know a lot of farming families don’t." [male, 20s]

Implications for Identity and Sustainability

One temptation for policy makers and managers seeking sustainability must surely be to encourage landholders to adopt more sustainable land management practices by uniting them against "urban threats".

Although rurality is a core part of landholders' identity, they do not necessarily independently define it, rather it is being defined for them by others. For example political parties such as the National Party and farmers associations such as the National Farmers' Federation are defining it in ways to assist their own survival. Images of what is rural are constructed by the media and increasingly by urban people who see urban areas as a place for recreation and de-stressing (a tourism focus). Assisting rural people to have more control over how their identity is defined could be an important step towards sustainability. Gray and Lawrence (2001) argue that achieving this depends in part on reflexive practice by rural people.

Social capital is widely accepted as being present in rural communities as well as important for social sustainability. However, we should not assume that rural communities are imbued with social capital. Rather, unequal social divisions have prevented the development of social capital in many rural settings. This study illustrates that heterogeneity. Therefore, drawing on rurality as part of peoples' identities will not necessarily build social capital.

Conclusions

This paper explored in detail six elements of identity in relation to sense of place on farming lands. Identity is clearly has multiple elements. Those most frequently and passionately mentioned were hard work and achievement, having productive land and constructing rurality. Any efforts at restructuring as part of sustainability must take into account the importance of hard work and the land to landholders' identity. Also important but probably more problematic are landholders being closely linked to notions of rurality, a rurality which they may have little part in defining. This could also be an advantage because the image could be re-negotiated to include strong sustainability features. For example, rurality could come to be defined as stewardship for ecosystem services, where landholders manage their land to "produce" clean water, sequester carbon or protect soil resources *but only if it complements other elements of their identity*.

In a the broader context of achieving sustainable agriculture, understanding sense of place illustrates clearly the importance of identity to the agricultural enterprise. Without understanding how identity is constructed and negotiated with significant others and the land itself it would seem difficult to make the changes necessary for the move towards sustainable agriculture.

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